

# EQUATIONS Critique on the Draft Tourism Master Plan: Goa- 2011

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March 2007

*To compete with other States and upcoming destinations of South and South East Asia, the Goa Tourism 10 Year Master Plan evolved in 2001. The objectives listed in the plan focuses on increasing economic growth of Goa through the tourism industry; mainly dispersing tourist attractions from coast to hinterland, diversification of tourism products, development of infrastructure and promotion of tourism. None of the objectives in the Master Plan talks about minimizing the adverse economic, social and cultural impacts of tourism. There is no cognizance of issues like environmental degradation (loss of biodiversity, scarcity of freshwater, waste generation), violation of Coastal Regulation Zones (CRZ) Notification, cultural decay, sex tourism, child labour, child and women trafficking, alienation of the communities from their lands and their minimal share in the profits generated by tourism. The plan also fails to recognize the constitutional rights and role of the panchayats, gram sabha and other local bodies in development decisions within their jurisdiction. This paper critiques the draft of this 10 Year Master Plan and conveys in detail how such a plan would lead to unregulated tourism development in Goa and only further tourism's adverse impacts in Goa.*

Goa was liberated from Portuguese rule in 1961 and became a Union Territory of Government. It became separate state of the country in 1987. Goa has witnessed a very fast growth of tourism after its liberation. In five-year plans of Government of India, Goa received a special attention in infrastructure development and tourism promotion. In 1970s and 1980s, Goa was promoted as "Europe of East" to attract more foreign tourists and it became a prime destination for the foreign tourists. While Goa and tourism became synonymous – tourism in Goa brought along with it a host of problems, ranging from social, cultural to violation of critical environmental norms.

Post 1991, many other states like Kerala, Rajasthan and other southern states aggressively started promoting tourism. To compete with other states and upcoming destinations of South and South East Asia, Goa started marketing tourism aggressively. "Go Goa 365 days holidays", Go Goa: Everything Included" and recently "Go Goa: A perfect holiday destination" are some of the campaigns pushed by the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC), a commercial wing of Goa Tourism Department. It is in this backdrop that Goa tourism 10-year master plan was evolved in 2001. The focus seems to be on generating greater revenue and foreign exchange for the state and does not place comprehensive development programme for people as an important consideration or goal. Issues like environmental degradation, violation of Coastal Regulation Zones Notification, cultural decay, sex tourism, child labour, child and women trafficking, alienation of the communities from their lands have not been touched upon by the Master plan.

## **Vision, Approach and Objectives of the Master Plan**

The task of preparing Master Plan 2001 was commissioned to Consulting Engineering Services (India) Private Limited, a Delhi based consulting firm. The Master Plan outlines tourism as an important segment of Goan economy. In its vision, plan recognizes that tourism is not an isolated activity and needs to be integrated with larger economic, social and environmental systems. The Plan also outlines that local communities should not suffer from adverse environmental and social impacts of tourism.

However, the progressive approach seems to stop there because these are not reflected in the objectives of the plan. None of the seven objectives talk about minimizing adverse impacts of tourism, whether economic, social or environmental. The objectives listed in the plan are mainly related to increasing economic growth of Goa through tourism industry, dispersing tourist attractions from coast to hinterland, diversification of tourism products, and development of infrastructure and promotion of tourism all round the year. Experiences of such economic growth centric tourism in Goa and other parts of country has shown that it is the industry which makes substantial economic benefits, while local communities have very minimal or no share in the huge profit generated. The plan has not paid attention to the need benefits of any form reaching local communities of Goa seemingly on the assumption based on the famous trickle down thesis that that these objectives will automatically lead to the benefits to local communities. The tourism industry is also heavily affected by other pressing environmental concerns, such as global climate change, the loss of biodiversity, scarcity of freshwater, depletion of natural resources, pollution from solid and liquid wastes pollution from atmospheric emissions and land degradation. Often these costs and negative impacts are not taken into consideration while the profitability of tourism as contribution to national economies are calculated.

One of the objectives of the master plan is to spread tourism to the hinterland and developing new products of tourism. The Goa Government does not seem to have taken into consideration the harsh lessons from its experience of tourism, which has led to environmental degradation, and social problems of serious nature. Tourism development, especially on the coastal areas, has resulted in a host of environmental problems like erosion of sand dunes, depletion of groundwater, accretion of the sea and coastal erosion, siltation of coastal water bodies like estuaries and wetlands, declining fish catches, and loss of biodiversity especially through encroachment of tourism on turtle nesting sites and added pressures on coral reefs. Although the environmental diversity and sensitivity of Goa has been widely known, the Master Plan has also ignored aspects like customary rights, land ownership, a variety of stakeholders with very differing interests and has made it difficult for Goa to define a tourism strategy and to enforce its implementation.

### **Environmental Conservation and Protection**

The topography of Goa is diverse, with Sahyadri ranges of Western Ghats in eastern part of state, and coastal strip on the western flank and there is narrow plain or midland region lies between the coast and Western Ghats. The State has very fragile coastal and hill ecosystem and hence any master plan needs to consider these physiographic characteristics. Although in its vision, the Master Plan 2001 talks about environmental sustainability and conservation, the analysis and recommendation of the Plan has very little to say about these aspects. Chapter 2, 3 and 4 of the Master Plan are devoted to the analysis of current tourism scenario in Goa. In all these chapters, including chapter on SWOT (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats), analysis of environmental aspects and assessment of tourism impacts on environment has been completely left out. In SWOT analysis, the plan does not recognize the threats, which coastal areas of Goa have already faced or are currently facing due to tourism and infrastructure projects. It is interesting to note that according to Master Plan the critical threats to Goa tourism is competition from Kerala, Maharashtra and other island destinations, social problems, inadequate infrastructure and negative publicity by organizations against tourism.

There is a small section on environmental impact assessment (EIA), but it lists out general environmental impacts of tourism and has very little analysis on Goa. It says that there is lot of violations made on Goa coast, but recommendations do not include adherence to CRZ norms and any other legal frames related to environmental protection.

There is ample focus in the plan on development of tourism in mid land and Western Ghats, ecotourism in hills and wildlife sanctuaries, and adventure tourism. The Plan has special focus on tourism promotion in the six protected areas of the state, along with the promotion of heritage and cultural tourism. The plan also emphasizes that Government should enter into a tie-up with private sector to provide infrastructure facilities and develop water sports, adventure sports, heritage tourism, adventure tourism, cultural tourism in interior areas and eco-tourism to tourist packages in the Western Ghats. Most of these areas are ecologically fragile areas and development of facilities in the interior areas is in complete violation of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. Even though these areas may not have a protected area status, opening up of these areas for tourism would only mean endangering the fragile ecosystems and the livelihood conditions of the communities.

Tourism in the wild life sanctuaries is permitted solely at the discretion of the Chief Wildlife Warden of the state, as per Section 20 of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972. The infrastructure that is provided to the visitors as a consequence of the permit to tourism is in direct contradiction and in violation of Section 2 of the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. In areas where the infrastructure does not have legal grounds to operate in the protected area it invariably tends to accumulate in the periphery of the protected areas by endangering the flora and fauna of the region and which is in direct contrast of the wildlife preservation and forest conservation laws.

The Master Plan focuses more on the construction activities and infrastructure development such as accommodation, water supplies, restaurants and recreation facilities which may lead to scaling up of sand mining, beach and sand dune erosion, soil erosion and extensive paving. In addition, road and airport construction can lead to land degradation and loss of wildlife habitats and deterioration of scenery. Besides recommending tourism in hinterland, the coasts, which has been the conventional tourist attraction of Goa has also received lot of attention in the plan. Due to unbalanced and unregulated growth of tourism, there has been mushrooming of resorts, leading to undesirable pressures on coastal ecosystem. . The current practice which is seen is that there are several violations by the tourism industry, leading to the deterioration of the coastal region and violation of the Coastal Regulation Zone Notification (CRZ) 1991. These needs to have a special mention in the policy in way of tourism industry's recognition

and adherence the coastal regulation zone laws and ensure participation of the coastal communities in the beach tourism. The High Court of Goa as already recognized nearly 400 cases of violations of CRZ Notification and notified removal of these violations.

The Plan has envisaged land requirement for star and non-star categories by the year 2021 to 65.76.ha and 46.97 ha respectively and thus requiring additional land of 112.73 ha. The policy has not given attention to the possible destruction that such large-scale construction could cause, especially in the coastal regions. No efforts have been made towards analyzing the carrying capacities of various regions or insisting that entrepreneurs must submit impact assessment report, before the inception of project.

### **Social and Cultural Aspects**

The adverse impacts that tourism has on the society and environment have only increased, but are still not considered urgent enough to be addressed. Tourism has significantly contributed to the escalation of problems like marginalization of local communities, child labour, child sexual abuse, child trafficking and exploitation of women. The chapter on socio cultural impact very briefly talks about positive and some negative impacts of tourism on society and culture. Interestingly the perspective of plan is to propagate tourism as positive motivation for Goan society, its cultural aspects like food, dance, crafts etc. As recommendation to prevent socio- cultural problems, plan says “*Maintain the authenticity of Goan dance, music, dress, even though they are somewhat adapted for presentation to tourists*” It recommends “ Public awareness programmes about tourism may be organized and public meetings to combat agitation by NGOs against tourism”. The unwillingness of the plan to acknowledge the content and evidence of the social impacts generated by tourism in Goa and the reason for sustained advocacy and campaigns by civil society organizations. The plan takes the view that NGOs are unnecessarily raising their voices against unregulated development. There is no recognition of or recommendation on combating increasing cases of child sexual abuse, trafficking, child labour and exploitation of women in the state. Similar to environmental impacts, the plan simply recommends careful planning and monitoring, with very inadequate details on roles and responsibilities of various institutions and agency, including government and industry.

### **Development Controls and Zoning**

The Plan projects for tourist arrival of more than 27 lakhs by the year 2021, which is about 2.5 times from the 1998, base year taken in Master Plan. The plan fails to provide any sound rationale for this projection and therefore, even zoning and development controls have not been adequately addressed. The Plan suggests several ways to calculate this threshold, including environmental carrying capacity, but it is not clear from recommendation on the methodology adopted by this plan. Most of the development controls are guided mostly by demand of tourists and not environmental and social realities of Goa. They mostly talk about kind of facilities and amenities hotel should have to cater demand of tourists. However, on the positive side the plan also recommends access of people to the coastal land and ownership of sandy beaches be given to the government. This recommendation may help people who are largely dependent on coast for their livelihoods. At the same time, plan does not take in consideration the violations made by big tourism players on Goa beaches thereby affecting livelihood of fisherfolks and small shack owners. For instance, the star category hotels and resorts such as Bogomalo Beach Resort, Holiday Inn Resort, Leela Palace at Mobor beach and Taj Fort Aguda Resort at Calangute beach and several other resorts have come on the beaches in recent years. On an average each of these star category resorts have used about 20 acres of land on the beach. The Taj Fort Aguda Resort has used about 73-acre land on Calangute beach, one of the major attractions for tourists. This has affected people’s access to the coast to pursue traditional livelihood. The small shack owners and communities dependent on fishing have been affected by such developments.

As far zoning is concerned, plan is completely silent in this regard. It does not give details of ecologically fragile areas of Goa and kind of permissible activities within each of these zones. Hence, plan also lacks any site-specific strategy for tourism development, environmental controls and protection. For instance, plan does not give the details of legal frames operational in different zones such as hills, forests and coasts.

### **Implementation Institutional Arrangements**

The plan suggests new institutional arrangement for Goa tourism. Based on California Tourism Commission, the plan suggests for the creation of Goa Tourism Commission (GTC), to coordinate, promote tourism development and encourage development in unexplored areas. Tourism Minister, officials of tourism department and nominated members by the Government will be members of this commission. This arrangement suggested by the plan has two fold problems. Firstly, it encourages highly centralized form of tourism decision making, without giving any space to local level participation and decision-making. Secondly, this arrangement appears to be duplication of existing role of

Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC). Plan also does not suggest dissolution of GTDC rather it suggests, GTDC, along with tourism department TTAG and other agencies will play a key role in tourism development. However, these roles are not even defined. The plan should have recommended institutional roles and responsibilities within existing frame, with adequate powers given to local bodies such as municipalities and Panchayat Raj Institutions.

## Conclusion

On the whole, the plan appears as infrastructure, investment and tourism promotion plan and not a master plan. The essential elements of planning process as mentioned in the above sections have been neglected by the Plan. If implemented, such a Plan would lead to unregulated tourism development in Goa, adding to serious environmental and social impacts. The needs of tourists are given more importance to the local population. It is evident from the fact that in the process of data collection the Plan has considered opinion of tourists, but not the local population. This will give rise to conflicts over the use of local resources (e.g., water, beaches, and transport).

In competing with Kerala and neighbouring states, the Plan has forgotten some essential development controls and environmental regulations and gone ahead with proposing newer areas for tourism development. Usually tourism season in Goa is about 5-6 months long (October- February), but this plan even suggests tourism in monsoon and summer, thus making tourism a year round activity. Diversion of products and expansion of areas are the principles of this Master Plan and not the environmental and social sustainability. The plan fails to recognize the constitutional rights of the panchayats, gram sabha and other local bodies in granting completion/approval/construction permission certificates which is required by the tourism industry.

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